DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 213 071 EA 014 285

TITLE Report on Symposium on Effective Schools (Belmont Retreat Center, Elkridge, Maryland, April 12-14, 1980).
INSTITUTION National Committee for Citizens in Education, Columbia, Md.
PUB DATE Jun 80
NOTE 50p.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Administrator Role; Conferences; Educational Environment; Educational Objectives; *Educational Practices; *Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Expectation; Institutional Characteristics; Leadership Responsibility; Parent Participation
IDENTIFIERS *School Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

A three-day conference on effective schools sponsored by the National Committee for Citizens in Education brought educational researchers, school practitioners, and parents together to discuss a promising approach for restoring the quality of urban schools. This paper, a report of the conference, provides a succinct review of the literature on effective schools, listing school characteristics that appear to be linked to student achievement and factors that are apparently not related to student achievement. In addition it summarizes the conference proceedings (including the results of a preconference survey of participants) and the consensus reached on strong leadership, the ingredients of effective schools, goals and objectives, parent and community participation, expectations for students, school climate, and inservice training. A minority report is also reviewed and collective actions suggested for the future. The question of what makes an effective school generated answers from three different perspectives--those of practitioners, parents, and researchers. In conclusion, the report points out implications of the effective practices discussed during the symposium. (WD)

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Report on

SYMPOSIUM ON EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

April 12-14, 1980
Belmont Retreat Center
Elkridge, Maryland

EA 014 285

National Committee for Citizens in Education

Columbia, Maryland

June 1980

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INTRODUCTION

In late winter 1980, NCCE agreed to host a three-day conference on "Effective Schools" at the request of the Hazen Foundation. The original proposal was that we would bring together a group of educational researchers with school practitioners to assess a promising approach for restoring the quality and integrity of urban schools. As an organization, we are certainly supportive of that goal, and since the focus of current effective schools' theory is on what happens at the individual school site, we felt we were on the same wave length with proponents. We have recently held exploratory conferences and training sessions for school people and parents on the effective management of individual school sites. A conference on improving individual school effectiveness seemed a logical extension.

What we wanted to add to the Hazen proposal was parents. Since bringing parents into a local school partnership is the focus of our work, we asked that the proposal be modified to include them as participants. Certainly, we reasoned, researchers and practitioners needed to hear the reactions of the consumers of public schooling to what is being proposed. But additionally, we believe parents can make contributions to an effective school plan based on their own experiences with their own children and their own schools that are no less valuable than the best thoughts of researchers and practitioners. Each group brings a unique

realm of experience to bear on a complex problem and those who seek solutions need to hear all the expert witnesses they can. Hazen agreed, the conference became tripartite in nature, and invitations went out to a small group of researchers whose work is well respected, to practitioners who are secure enough to entertain change, and to parent leaders who are known to be feisty but are eager to work within the system.

None of the invitees needed convincing that the mission of improving inner city schools is an urgent one. The signs of urban school failure are many. High truancy and dropout rates, low test scores, the flight of families with school-age children from our cities, and the quest for alternatives to what urban public schools have to offer, all tell us that urban schools have lost their way, and that time may be running out for restoring them. What those who now identify themselves with the effectiveness movement say they have to brighten this bleak picture is a plan for individual schools, one that will turn around low achievement and end the public's disenchantment with public schools in the process. Such a School Improvement Plan is being tried in the New York City Schools.

Naturally, all those who will be affected by effective schools' experiments are eager to hear more and to be consulted in the process, foremost among them the school practitioners who will be expected to change their way of doing things and the parents whose children will be used to test out these new theories. The Hazen

Foundation and NCCE also have high interest in what researchers claim will make city schools more effective, Hazen's interest springing from a desire to evaluate effectiveness research as a possible direction for its future support, NCCE's from a conviction that what happens for learners at each individual school site is critical and that the involvement of parents and the community in that process will improve the learning experience for all the children at a particular school.

Reduced to its most basic elements, the effectiveness movement says that if schools are properly run, they can teach all children the basic skills their parents want them to have -- the skills they will need to function as independent adults. This reverses the preponderance of recent thinking about success in school that has insisted that it is what a child brings with him or her to school from home, more than what is introduced at school, that determines how well a student learns. Although effective school believers are by no means singleminded about how to gear up schools for this kind of success, several have identified what they claim to be essential ingredients and have plans for putting them into place. Ronald Edmonds with his School Improvement Plan for New York City is a prime example of putting this kind of theory into practice.

With the goals of (1) careful assessment of a fresh approach to schooling and (2) consultation of all those to be affected in the process, NCCE assembled a mixed group of participants. Parents, researchers, and practitioners all gave up the weekend of April 12-14 to attend the conference held at Belmont, the Smithsonian Institution's retreat center between Baltimore and Washington, DC.

They came prepared to deliberate on questions like these:

- Is effectiveness viewed or defined in reasonably similar ways by parents, practitioners, and researchers?
- Can features which identify a few successful urban schools lead other schools to equal success?
- Can effective schools endure over time?
- Do parents have a role in the effectiveness process?

A collection of some of the growing literature on effectiveness in preparation for the conference convinced NCCE that the concept could become a rallying point for parents who are tired of being blamed for their children's failure in school. At the same time, we could see the potential for resistance and defensiveness on the part of educators to whose methods the blame is essentially being shifted. Educators might use the opportunity to rail at parents who resist change, who are suspicious of innovation that might help their children, and who in educators' view organize to impede educational progress. Whether those feelings are indeed prevalent and whether they rose to the surface as the conference proceeded, the reader will discover in the sections of this report devoted to each of the three groups of participants, immediately following the proceedings section.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

For some years we were led to believe that poor children, particularly those in inner-cities, were doomed to a life of failure because they could not learn basic school subjects like reading and arithmetic. What's more, it was believed that schools couldn't do much about this. If children came from a background of poverty, their inability to learn was fixed by circumstances of family and environment, over which schools had no control.

This conclusion was bolstered by such well-publicized research as that of James Coleman and others, and soon became part of the mythology. If poor children were not expected to learn, why should schools even try? Even parents, and the children themselves, were convinced of their failure in school. If more proof was required, everyone had only to point to the fact that billions of dollars in federal assistance over nearly two decades, for hundreds of different "innovations," apparently made little difference in the achievement of these students.

But now new research is proving otherwise. Not all poor, minority children fail to learn. In fact, some learn extremely well. Why? This question is intriguing scholars who have been uncomfortable with the idea of consigning generation after generation of these children to the scrapheap. They conjecture that, if some children do learn while others coming from the

same backgrounds do not, we should look at the schools rather than at the children or their families to find root causes for the difference.

Their approach takes essentially two forms: (1) find schools whose children consistently perform above average in reading and arithmetic on standardized tests, and identify those school factors that account for that achievement; and (2) compare high achieving schools with low achieving ones and pinpoint the differences.

By now, a respectable body of research has been produced. It is characterized by its concentration on urban elementary schools, and within these, the early grade levels. Also it has tended to use, as criteria of effectiveness, the results of achievement tests, whether nationally standardized, state-wide, or locally prepared. The most important finding of this research has been to confirm what most parents already know: <u>every child can learn to read and to perform arithmetic</u>. No less important has been its success in finding practical suggestions that shed light on what seems to make that happen.

At NCCE's symposium on effective schools, researchers discussed their own findings and those of their colleagues with parents and practitioners. Attending the meetings were David Clark of the University of Indiana; Ronald Edmonds of Harvard University and concurrently the New York City Schools; George Weber, recently of the Council for Basic Education; and Michael Cohen and Ann Milne of the National Institute of Education.

While some differences exist in their conclusions about what the significant variables are that explain what makes an effective school, more striking is the wide degree of agreement. Findings are summarized in the table below. The number at the right portrays the number of researchers out of a total of thirteen whose writings were available for review and analysis and whose findings lend support to that factor as related to student achievement (see Appendix A for the research findings summarized below).

Schools Whose Students Achieve Have These Ingredients	# of Researchers Identifying the Variable
1. A curriculum emphasizing achievement in reading and math. Staff giving maximum time to the task of achieving reading and arithmetic goals. Their responsibilities limited to those things schools can do particularly well.	11
2. Strong, assertive principals or other leaders who:	10
a. create a school climate which provides a sense of order and purpose;	
b. have high expectations for both teachers and students;	
c. support or initiate staff development activities, allowing time for staff planning and cross-fertilization of ideas;	
d. initiate special programs or projects to solve instructional problems;	

	# of Researchers Identifying the Variable
e. maintain discipline;	
f. serve as the school's main instructional leader.	
3. Greater involvement of parents in the school's instructional program in the classroom setting and/or in policy decisions.	6
4. Staffs who believe that <u>all</u> students can master objectives.	5
5. Required specific evaluation of individual pupil performance or program performance or both, as a basis for changing teaching methods. Acceptance of the concept of accountability.	4
6. Clearly stated curricular goals and objectives, reached by consensus of all concerned.	4
7. Concern for the social and organizational setting of the classroom.	2
8. Frequent use of prescriptive instructional programs or more structured teaching approaches.	2
9. Teachers who are not necessarily charismatic, but who are hardworking and well organized.	1
10. Staffs who are more likely to assume responsibility for teaching reading and mathematics and are committed to doing so.	1
11. A lower than usual ratio of children to adults in the instructional setting.	1

Factors on Which Researchers Report Conflicting Results

	# Researchers Identifying the Variable	
Use of various procedures for individualization of instruction	+1 (positive relationship)	-1 (negative relationship)

Factors Apparently NOT Related to Student Achievement

1.	Physical plant.	4
2.	Class size -- except that more adults around to work with children characterize successful schools.	2
3.	School expenditures above certain level.	1
4.	Achievement grouping	1
5.	Ethnic background of teachers or principal.	1
6.	Teacher characteristics, such as tenure or graduate education.	1
7.	Field trips or assemblies.	1
8.	Gender of students.	1
9.	Use of tangible student rewards.	1
10.	Artwork on walls.	1

Researchers doubt that any one or two of the positively-related factors account for student achievement in the effective school. Their findings suggest that some group of factors working together may explain school success, but this is not the same as saying we can use what we know to make ineffective schools effective. This has yet to be proven, but Edmonds is trying in New York.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Design and Rationale

One of NCCE's primary concerns for the symposium was that parents be given the opportunity to have equal voice in the proceedings. A logical and easy way to plan the conference would have been to schedule presentations. Researchers could have talked about their findings and practitioners about the programs in their schools designed to increase effectiveness. We chose not to take this approach, because we saw danger of "ego massaging" with the only role for parents being simply to react to presentations.

Instead, we chose an alternate route. We wanted to build on the research base, but not be limited by it. The symposium was designed on the premise that "Everyone's contribution is valued. No one individual has all the answers." To that end, all participants were provided with some background reading on effective schools. A bibliography of those materials will be found in Appendix A, page 44.

In the symposium itself, we designed a process that took us through the following sequence of objectives:

- To introduce the conference and the participants;
- To develop a working definition of an "effective school," based on outcomes of such a school;
- To arrive at the ingredients which participants hold to be essential to an effective school;

- To define and describe the ingredients;
- To consider the implementation of these ingredients in a local school: (1) implications, (2) limitations, and (3) flexibility;
- To develop positive roles parents can play to move schools toward effectiveness;
- To summarize the conference;
- To decide on next steps.

Alternating between small work groups and plenary sessions, we intentionally kept a mix of parents, researchers and practitioners in each group throughout. In the small groups, a shared leadership approach was followed. NCCE staff recorded the proceedings of the small groups, but did not take facilitator roles. Two facilitators presented tasks to the total group and worked to keep the group on target.

Evaluations at the close of the conference indicated that some of the participants (4 practitioners and 2 researchers) would have preferred a more standard approach of a formal presentation/discussion format. Others (researchers, parents, and practitioners alike), however, commented positively on the new approach for a conference of this type.

Survey of Participants

To get a head start on the first 2 sessions, we sent questionnaires to the participants. They were asked to indicate

their opinions about 1) the outcomes essential to an effective school, and 2) the ingredients necessary to achieve the priority outcomes. The ingredients listed in the questionnaire were derived from the literature on effective schools. The outcome options were broader than basic-skills-only used as a measure by effectiveness researchers, because we were not satisfied that practitioners and parents would automatically accept researchers' definition of "effective."

Effective for What?

The survey indicated, in a preliminary way, that participants had unanimous agreement that basic literacy, communication skills, arithmetic skills, and the ability to think, reason, and solve problems are necessary outcomes if a school is to earn the badge of "effective."

The pre-symposium survey allowed participants to designate priorities:

- basic skills only;
- basic skills plus good test scores;
- basic skills plus established moral and ethical values;
- basic skills plus positive self-image for students;
- basic skills plus student and community satisfaction with the schools and positive self-image of students.

In the opening session of the symposium, participants were asked to choose the category (or develop a new one) that most

nearly represented their ideas about the outcomes of an effective school.

A few participants, mostly researchers, held that the "basic skills" are all that are required. The majority of the participants, however, firmly advanced the position that students' positive self-image and student and community satisfaction with the school be added to "basic skills" in the definition of an effective school.

Controversy ran high in the first session, and each camp held firmly to its position, dispelling hopes that consensus definition of effective schooling could be reached. At one point, a participant suggested that the rest of the symposium be conducted in two groups, so that each group could pursue its own definition. But the total group agreed that they wanted to stay together, acknowledging their differences. Whether the purpose of staying together was to learn from or to persuade the other group is open to question. As it happened, neither group was persuaded to change position during the course of the event.

Ingredients of Effective Schools

Despite a lack of consensus over necessary outcomes of an effective school in an early session, the group did move on to identify critical ingredients. Out of a field of several dozen considered, members of the group gave these the greatest support:

1. Strong leadership by the school principal and designated others.
2. An evaluation system including student progress, staff, and the school itself.
3. Consensus on goals for the school; consensus on clearly understood teaching objectives and the priorities assigned to those objectives.
4. A considerable degree of autonomy for the school, allowing shared decision making by all those in the school community (parents, teachers, students, the principal). A meaningful level of participation by the parents.
5. Community involvement including utilization of available resources and responsiveness to the community.
6. A focus on achievement and high expectations for all students.
7. The school considering itself a problem-solving unit.
8. Harmony between research on the learner and learning process and practice.
9. In-service training and staff development for teaching staff.
10. A school climate that is orderly, serious, safe and attractive.

Many of these components have appeared previously in effective schools' research, but no one to our knowledge has proposed so comprehensive a list.

Conference participants devoted one entire day to working in small groups that defined each area, created guidelines for identifying these characteristics, and recommended ways to implement them successfully in schools. We believe the concentrated effort of these leading scholars, educators, and parents has produced a unique and valuable set of recommendations to schools that are open to change. We will attempt to summarize the best thoughts of the three working subgroups in the hope that they will assist all who are interested in helping children in school.

Strong Leadership

A person in a position of designated authority with responsibility in the following areas: (1) redefinition of the school's mission, which includes a vision of an effective school; (2) development of a program to get there with the involvement of those affected; (3) supervision and oversight of the follow-through; and (4) removal of obstacles for the staff to proceed.

Certainly this describes the school principal, but the group agreed that leadership could also spring from groups of teachers, parents, the community, and even students, particularly when the

momentum for change originates in those spheres. The most effective leader does not sell his own program, but, regardless of the program's source, is responsible for seeing it through. The discussion group saw a leader as both an initiator and a reactor.

As to how to achieve strong leadership, the group expressed a number of ideas:

1. Transfer the most able people to the most difficult situations.
2. Require formal administrators' evaluation.
3. Remove incompetents.
4. Provide in-service training, including career development and retraining.
5. Initiate a reward system for those who succeed.
6. Give central office support to school leaders.
7. Have the superintendent emphasize leadership development.
8. Create an intra-system support group or network for people in positions of leadership.
9. Improve criteria for selection.
10. Practice selective retention, adopt a limited-term appointment system.
11. Provide the option of early retirement.

Evaluation and Consensus on Goals and Objectives

The study group examining goals and objectives acknowledged that without consensus on the goals of the school and clearly understood teaching objectives, ranked in order of importance, evaluation cannot proceed. Without evaluation of progress, goals and objectives have little meaning. The difficulty of reaching consensus on goals and objectives for teaching children, and for the school as a whole, is not to be underestimated, and the group recognized that often consensus is only possible at the sacrifice of a high level of specifics. Still, a clear sense of direction and commitment is necessary for school success. The scope of evaluation should be school-wide, participants decided, with all those contributing to school effectiveness being evaluated on a regular, careful, and frequent basis. Evaluation of student progress is certainly key, but the contributions of teachers, administrators, and even parents should also undergo scrutiny. Teachers, students, and parents can be trained in self-evaluation, as well as in school evaluation.

To achieve effective evaluation, these steps were suggested:

1. Add and integrate into the system both classroom-based and school-based systems, including standardized measures, lesson plans, criterion referenced tests, text-related and informal measures.

2. Provide in-service assistance to accomplish the above for the purpose of making evaluation improve instruction, not prove it.
3. Convey information on progress to students and parents, and allow the opportunity for parent reaction and assistance.
4. Reorient school people to use test information so that the progress of every child is continually monitored.
5. Attend to children having the most difficulty.
6. Send principals into the classroom to supervise and work with teachers on the evaluation of student progress.

Parent and Community Participation

"Parents are able to affirm the worth of the school because the school affirms the worth of the community." This is the way one participant described the atmosphere of mutual trust and respect that should exist between the inner school community and the community at large. Affirming worth is demonstrated by identifying and making use of community resources and including parents in both the educational process and governance of local schools. These are indications that this kind of linkage exists:

1. An active initiative on the school's part to welcome parent participation.

2. Evidence that parents are assuming a variety of functional roles in the school.
3. Parent training by people of their own choice.
4. Parents moving freely in and out of the school.
5. Easy dialogue between parents and school people.
6. Parents used as a resource for their child's learning, to reinforce school instruction.

Principals need to be aware of the verbal and nonverbal messages that communicate the inclusion or exclusion of parents. It is the principal who can provide ways for parents and teachers to talk about basic issues, including parent/teacher conferences, grade conferences, workshops, parent volunteer programs, and direct linkage to the community. Beyond school-initiated efforts, certain kinds of parent involvement are required by the board of education, superintendent, state, or federal programs. To improve the effectiveness of parent-and school-initiated parent participation, parents need money, training on their rights and responsibilities, and knowledge of how to use the power these rights give them.

<u>High Expectations for All Students and a Focus on Academic Goals for All Students Based on Performance</u>

This restates the essence of the effectiveness movement: <u>all children can learn in school</u>. The study group agreed it is the school principal who sets the tone and provides the climate and structure that sets high expectations and enables them to be

met. Mechanisms for meeting high expectations include recognition of student and teacher performance, flexible grouping, mastery learning, retention when necessary to insure mastery, and a statement of primary goals with regard to achievement.

Teachers specifically help students meet high expectations when (1) they devote more time to the task of teaching, (2) their questions elicit a high percentage of correct answers, (3) they provide immediate feedback to students, telling them whether answers are right or wrong, (4) their instruction is directed at the whole class or small groups (it is not individualized), and (5) they are sensitive to the emotional and motivational needs of children.

<u>School Considers Itself a Problem-Solving Unit; Harmony Between Research on the Learner and Learning Process, and Practice; In-Service Training; and a School Climate that is Orderly, Serious, Safe, and Attractive</u>.

The study group which considered these ingredients recommended that the school operating as a problem-solving unit is critical to the success of the other three. When schools build a sense of community, all the actors in schooling refer to the local school as "we," not "us-and-them." Battles for turf and egos are set aside, and a school can get on with reaching consensus on its mission and pursuing that mission. A concerted and congenial effort to reach goals for that school will then lead to harmony between research and practice, effective training, and a healthy learning climate.

Problem-solving mechanisms can be duplicated in other schools, but each school's assessment of problems and remedies is its own unique product. Training works best when it does not separate factions of the school community, but enhances the school-as-partnership image, providing joint sessions for parents and teachers, teachers and administrators, and so forth. To make this happen will require expertise in identifying problems, in training to solve them, and in maintaining a balance of power in the community school. If the power structure favors one group over another, the sense of "we-ness" is lost. It helps to have policy supportive of this concept from the top -- the federal government, the state department of education, the local school board, and top administrators in the school system. It also helps to have public consensus that the school should work as a community.

The Role of Parents

Participants were asked to use the same small discussion group technique to explore two prevalent reasons for the failure of parent involvement to thrive in schools.

To bring parents into the picture as equals may require a mandate for participation and certainly will require special support for parent involvement of the kind NCCE provides. Considered in the cost of creating and maintaining the school community should be special services, like transportation and baby-sitting, that will allow parents to participate.

The two situations presented to the groups for discussion were: the school administration wants to involve parents, but parents are perceived as apathetic, and the other side of the coin -- parents want to be involved but schools resist. What can be done about these impasses? Again, a mix of researchers, practitioners, and parents worked together to provide illumination on each problem and to offer solutions to the entire group for discussion.

The school administration wants to involve parents, but parents are perceived as apathetic. Parents and practitioners who spoke from experience readily offered that any school administrator who is plagued by parent apathy has not found a way to involve parents in school. Parent nonresponse may be a response to the administrator's own behavior. The real problem here is a failure to connect. Making the connection is the school principal's responsibility, and he or she will know he has succeeded when parents come forward. Schools' failure to communicate their needs, including a need to involve parents meaningfully, is being verbalized all over the country, in churches, at the corner store, in local agencies and service groups, at all local parent groups in the community. These are expressions of concern and frustration, not apathy. A school administrator who cannot connect with the community should ask himself two questions: How did I arrive at the conclusion parents are apathetic? and why do I want parent support?

The way to connect with parents is to go where they are and to speak their language; that is, address their agenda and work

with them to meet their needs in the community school, not the administration's needs. It may mean knocking on doors (this has been done). It may mean listening as much as talking at parents' meetings. It most certainly means conveying a commitment to parent involvement and making parents part of the school community. It also means providing for parent participation within the confines of parents' available time and resources.

Parents will not remain involved if they are just supposed to rubber-stamp and legitimate the school's positions and priorities. Just as surely, they will not remain disenfranchised if they feel a sense of investment in their local schools. Meaningful parent involvement revolves around the axis of how much policy/decision-making power the administration is prepared to share. Key to the question of involvement is not how much parents are willing to <u>give</u>, but what level parent support and involvement the school will <u>allow</u>.

<u>Parents want to be involved; schools resist</u>. In the previous situation, it was the school administrator who recognized the problem and initiated changes to overcome what appeared to be parent indifference. In this case, it is the parents who must approach the school principal in a way that will change his attitude about letting parents into the system. Many of the same strategies that can change parents' minds about involvement will change school administrators'. Organized parents can assure the principal they are seeking a partnership with schools. They

are not there as adversaries of the system, or blame-layers. They do not want to usurp administrators' power, but they want to create a balance of power and lend support to the school. The principal must be convinced that there is something in it for him if he cooperates with parents. Frequently, a dramatic event will provide the impetus to parent involvement, but feelings of generalized dissatisfaction also provide an appropriate atmosphere in which to seek increased parent participation.

Parents may not succeed in their initial attempts to lower principal resistance. Administrators have a well-choreographed set of avoidance behaviors, most of which are less direct than refusal to cooperate. Commonly, they will put off parents with delaying tactics, including, "I have to attend to my staff, get them in my corner, before I can attend to parent concerns." Parents are wise if they are not put off too long. If they cannot move the principal to change within a reasonable length of time, they should go to a "friendly" higher authority who can put pressure on the school administrator.

In the long run, increasing parent participation calls for formal and structured change, including adopting a district-wide policy or state-wide law, providing training, information, and a network of support for parent efforts.

Minority Report -- A Departure from the Agenda

The reports on parent participation were delivered the final day of the conference in an atmosphere of some anger and dissension.

A group of parents who had caucused the night before, after a grueling 14-hour day, concluded that the same dynamic that pushes parents aside in the schools had been played out again at the symposium. They delivered their minority report to the rest of the participants. The parent agenda came last, they said, by which time some of the researchers and practitioners they wanted to reach had left. The researchers and practitioners who remained took exception to this, saying researchers and practitioners should not be put in boxes, since they hold varying points of view. Their concerns, said researchers, had received no platform at all, late in the day or otherwise. (Later individual evaluations of the conference revealed that a few professionals felt the parent component had been forced into the discussion of effective schools, when in fact it remains an unproven factor in school success.)

Parents responded that they did not arrive expecting to have to sell the parent point of view. They were caught short and off balance by researchers' already well-rehearsed litanies and, as a result, did not seize their opportunity to contradict the so-called experts. Even so, parents concluded they had gotten through to those researchers who discount parent participation. They had the opportunity to say that what those researchers are trying to do by excluding parent participation will not sit well, said one parent. Another participant asked that absent researchers get the message that the parent factor cannot be ignored. It is present whether educators like it or not. It can be a positive factor or it can be a negative factor, but it will not go away. Parents made the point again, as they had

in small group sessions, that parents do not want to be told, "trust me," by effective school proponents as they have been told by educators. They want to be consulted before the ideas are set. "Bring us in at the stage where we discuss what is effective."

Next Steps

In a last group effort, participants were asked what should come out of the symposium. In response, conferees shared both some personal next steps and suggested these collective actions in a brainstorming session:

- Inform parents of research findings.
- Commission more research over time to discover how ineffective schools can become effective.
- Let parents know it is their responsibility to make schools effective.
- Begin descriptive research on why some factors have a positive effect on learning.
- Research is needed to respond to the parent question: What effect do parents have on effective schools?
- Assert parent participation as an associative factor in effective schools.
- Include all the variables in future research.
- Because it places limits on learning, and because of its dramatic budget implications, "basic skills" is primarily a political term. What is needed is an educationally valid term to describe effective schools.

- Schools in cities should use effectiveness criteria to teach children who have not yet been taught.
- Trust-building experiences between parents and schools are needed.
- Practitioners need to involve parents in planning from the word go.
- Parents need assistance to develop skills in research, cost analysis, and research evaluation.
- Foundation funds should be sought to train parents and citizens to participate in these areas.
- Major attention should be given by schools to the ingredients of effective schools identified at this conference: namely, strong leadership, healthy school climate, high expectations for all students, time on task, full content coverage, child's self-image, and rewards for the student.
- The work accomplished in conference groups should be summarized and implemented locally. There should be a plan for broad dissemination of conference proceedings, especially among participant groups.

- School personnel should aid minority and bilingual students.
- Coalition of support for the idea that all children can learn should be built.
- Laws and policies should be put in place giving serious support to the subject of the conference.
- The impact of television on effective schools should be examined.
- A compilation of strategies which sustain effective schools should be made.
- A clearinghouse on effective schooling should be established. A resource manual should be made available to the public on the subject.

WHAT MAKES FOR AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL?

The Practitioners Said

The overall consensus of the attending practitioners was that an effective school has a sense of "we-ness." They expressed the opinion that all of the persons who had a stake in what happened to children needed to be involved in open communication. That meant not only parents and teachers, but custodial, clerical, and aides as well. Many participants also noted that trust and the building of trust among those involved was essential.

There was general agreement among the practitioners, in spite of the research debate which took place, that parents were an essential ingredient in an effective school and that parents needed to be involved in sharing decisions -- not just making cookies for the bake sale. There was also general agreement that there is little research beyond the pre-school level that deals with the impact on learning when parents are involved in governance issues, but that at that level, results are positive when parents are partners.

There was additional agreement that all the participants, including parents, need to help devise a program for the school that involves everyone in the planning process, including agenda setting.

All participants also should be involved in redefining the mission of the school so that it includes a vision of effectiveness for that school.

There was agreement that all should be involved in reaching consensus about the goals for the school and the resultant teaching/learning activities and their outcomes.

Other specific comments by practitioners referred to

- the need to perceive the local school as the effective unit for change and that that school could be encouraged to perceive itself as a problem solving unit -- one that <u>can</u> educate all children and does not accept conventional wisdom about ways of accomplishing that;
- the essential nature of training for all participants in the school program, especially parents, and that the school district had some direct responsibility to provide that training;
- the necessity to have expectations that all children can learn; and
- the role of the principal as the person who sets the climate and the learning environment for effectiveness for all children.

A few miscellaneous comments were

- that although many parents are perceived as apathetic, usually that is not apathy, but a lack of connection;

- when parents are perceived as performing only a monitoring role, then they are viewed as a threat, and defensive behavior ensues; and
- an expression of concern about students being involved in the process.

Perhaps one of the more telling comments was that effective schools are often not well loved. Many examples exist that demonstrate that effective schools often are targets and need to literally fight for their lives. We must not assume that an effective school will be well received by the establishment.

The Parents Said

Parents came from as close as Washington, DC, and as far away as Pontiac, Michigan, but all came with the expectation of talking with other parents, researchers, and practitioners, and of taking information home to share with other parents.

Just as we could not claim that researchers had a position or practitioners had a position on effective schools, we could not expect parents to hold unanimously to any point of view. When it came to the outcomes wanted from an effective school, however, everyone at the symposium agreed that basic literacy, communication skills, arithmetic skills, and the ability to think, reason, and solve problems were necessary outcomes if a school were to be considered effective. But none of the parents felt this "basic skills" package was enough.

Most of the parents (all but one) insisted on the inclusion of positive self-image for students and student and community satisfaction with the schools. Speaking for the group of parents, practitioners, and researchers who had this view, Betty Felton, a parent from New York City and a staff member of United Parents Association, stated that without liking her/himself, a student is not likely to learn efficiently. Further, the group asserted self-image to be a worthy goal on its own merit.

On the point of student and community satisfaction, this group held, because the students and the community are the consumers, they should have some say. In addition, they stated that student dissatisfaction might lead to non-attendance, which would, in turn, have a marked impact on acquisition of the "basic skills" package.

Many of the parent comments were focused on the need for parent involvement -- both in discussions about what is important in education and in decisions about the programs and policies at individual schools.

Even in the face of assertions from one of the researchers present that there is no correlation between parent involvement and effective schools, parents spoke strongly to the need for involvement.

One of the provisos parents urged was that the involvement be meaningful. Due to a time element and working hours, one parent said she didn't want to spend her time being class mother.

"I don't have much time to give, and I want to talk about how the school functions and about the quality of teaching in the building." One parent was concerned that even in federal programs, with mandated parent involvement, the parent involvement was "cursory."

That "it is easier for the principal, easier for the school committee, and in the best interest of the school to involve parents" was a philosophical position strongly held by parents and others at the symposium. But parents were really eager for that position to be supported positively by research.

Parents repeatedly urged researchers to find a way to look more carefully at the impact of parent involvement, particularly the governance type of involvement.

If parent involvement is linked to learning in early childhood education, then there must be a link to later learning, was the assertion. "Try to find a way to measure that link," was the plea.

In this discussion, it was clear that the parents felt parent involvement was important in and of itself, and did not necessarily need to be legitimated by a link to learning. At the same time, there was an awareness that for some researchers and practitioners, and for a portion of the general public as well, establishing this link would be necessary if the importance of parent involvement is to be widely accepted.

One of the participant observers, though not herself an official representative of the parent position, summed up the

prevalent view on parent involvement:

> Can we have an effective school without parent involvement? We are always dealing with the child's family -- it is a dream world to think we can deal with the child without dealing with the child's parent.

The issue of trust between professionals and parents was raised. In addition to the trust, parents desire a mutual respect -- and particularly a respect on the part of professionals -- that parents have a right to be there in the schools taking an active interest in the education of their children.

But even the right to an "active interest" had some caveats placed upon it by the parents. This right, the parents said, does not extend, for example, to a right to interrupt the classroom or the teaching-learning process.

A desire and need for training of parents was expressed again and again -- that along with the inclusion of parents, training is needed. Difficulty in communication among parents, teachers, and school administrators is one area mentioned that can be addressed through training. Parents want schools to be committed to putting some dollars into their training. But the parents want to maintain the right tc choose who will do the training. They don't want the district or the principal to decide for them.

At the same time, the parents recognized their own role in obtaining training. "Parents need to take some responsibility for providing money and training . . . ." "Parents have to

learn quickly that they have a responsibility if they are involved to develop skills. Waiting for the administration to provide ammunition is waiting for the unlikely."

Parents noted that in the large group sessions, parents as a whole did less talking than the other two groups. Parents had concern about this from two standpoints: 1) the sessions were not structured to support parent participation, and 2) parents were not assertively vocal enough to interject their views.

There was also concern that the parent role in making effective schools happen was the last agenda item, and as so often is their experience in their local setting, time for the parent agenda got squeezed.

Other concerns were mentioned by parents. A basic tenet that was heard throughout the symposium, but especially strongly voiced by parents, was the need to proceed on the assumption that all children can learn, and to counteract any attitudes to the contrary. A fear voiced by parents was that if the curriculum were limited to basic skills, middle class parents would withdraw their children. They would seek education elsewhere, in a place that included the enrichment they seek for their children.

The Researchers Said

The research specialists invited to the symposium had conducted original research on effective schools or were broadly versed in the research literature on it. David Clark, Ann Milne,

and Michael Cohen fit into the latter category, while Ronald Edmonds, George Weber, Evelyn Davila and, in a different way, Norman Newberg, into the former.

The prior research, which led the Hazen Foundation to support the symposium, demonstrated

1. Poor and minority children in some elementary schools were able to learn to read and perform arithmetic at levels comparable to the average middle class, white children in suburban schools, even when children in other schools with the same characteristics were not.
2. When the better schools with higher achievement scores on reading and arithmetic were compared with schools with lower average scores, a number of factors could be isolated to explain why these differences may have occurred.

If these factors could be introduced in all schools, would they turn the academically poorer ones around? Were there other variables not researched, but that experience pointed to as significant in improving the quality of education in those schools? What strategies can be recommended for enlisting school system cooperation and commitment? How can parents best help?

The symposium's research participants spoke mostly to research conducted (1) with elementary schools, (2) using improvement in achievement in reading and arithmetic as the measured end products of the research, and (3) with achievement tests, from locally

constructed to nationally standardized ones, serving as the measure of progress.

While different researchers often agreed on the major ingredients associated with the schools which succeeded in teaching poor, minority children, consensus was not always achieved on the specifics underlying them. Leadership, for example, was frequently cited as an imperative, yet just how that might be defined did not always produce agreement. Some believed the principal should be mainly the school's instructional leader; others that the principal should be a good supervisor and policy maker, one who defined the school's mission and had a far-reaching vision of what it should do. One researcher asked, "What does a leader do if others are not of a mind to follow?"

Consensus on educational goals of all constituencies involved in a school was generally found to be an aid to school effectiveness. However, some researchers pointed to the fact that there is seldom full agreement on what schools should be doing, a problem rooted in the natural diversity of our society. Even among the participants at the symposium, disparity of goals was evident. While reading and arithmetic were widely acknowledged as important objectives to be achieved, most would give some time, if not equal weight, to promotion of healthy self-image, student and parent satisfaction with the school, and specific affective outcomes. One researcher pointed out that consensus was important to student achievement on at least narrowly defined

goals. When, as often happens, goals are stated too broadly, the problem of consensus is aided, but the problems of definition of outcomes and of evaluation are clouded.

Several researchers emphasized the importance of other factors that served to differentiate schools with good average achievement from those with low average achievement. An orderly school climate was one. Maximizing time on task of reading and arithmetic was another, including minimizing distraction, teaching the whole class or small groups (rather than individualizing instruction), and focusing on high achievement. Most agreed, furthermore, that having high academic expectation of all students was associated with better academic achievement. Most also found careful, frequent evaluation of both student progress and school program progress to be another variable related to academic success.

Most discomfort, for researchers, arose in discussion of the effect of parent involvement on high and low academic achievement. Disagreement was rife on the definition, for example, of parent involvement. Involvement where -- in the classroom? in governance? at home reinforcing classroom instruction? Was parent involvement mandated? Invited? Negotiated? Demanded? Were parents trained to carry out whatever role they acquired? Some research pointed to parent and community participation as extremely effective in fostering achievement at pre-school levels, but research that confirms this at higher grade levels is judged inadequate. One researcher concluded that parent

participation was not a determiner of effective schools, finding it to exist at both effective and ineffective schools; but, he acknowledged, the variation in definition of "parent participation," and the absence of satisfactory measures of the phenomenon, left any conclusion about parent involvement tenuous, to say the least.

The researchers felt that the surface of effective schools research had only been scratched. A good deal more research is needed and much more remains to be learned about how to turn ineffective schools into effective ones, and how to maintain their effectiveness once achieved. Nonetheless, they did not feel that it was necessary to await long-term research to begin successfully to introduce change suggested by existing research. They cautioned, however, that research and evaluation should accompany new applications as a way of building on the knowledge already acquired.

NCCE CONCLUDES

It is not the purpose of this section to summarize, restate, or re-arrange the basic elements of this important meeting. Rather, we attempt here to be thoughtful about the future implications of effectiveness measures in school improvement and the particular role of parents in both moving this inquiry forward and influencing its impact and outcome.

From the earnest and spirited discussions of participants in this symposium, we conclude that

- An important beginning has been made in reversing the mythology and psychology of defeat about the learning potential of low-income, urban children.
- It is important to apply the effectiveness measures deduced from research in elementary schools to secondary schools in order to identify factors of general applicability and those which may be peculiar to age of children and configuration of teaching and administrative staff.
- The early and influential involvement of parents in programs designed to improve the quality of education continues to seriously lag behind the importance parents place on the education of their children, and the potential reservoir of ideas and support they can bring to school improvement efforts.

- For the first time in many years, a research-based set of conclusions about school improvement does not involve a clarion call for large amounts of money and innovative programming. Rather, the concentration is on certain factors that are human, organizational, goal-oriented, and in a collaborative and cooperative sense, doable.
- In any serious, substantial discussion of the condition of schools and how they might be made better, parents feel (and are made to feel) like "the new kid on the block," shy, uncertain, not very smart or informed. The day may be somewhat closer, however, when the farsighted educator needs each of these good people in order to get on with the business of making a school whatever it is capable of being -- including more effective.
- NCCE has historically been reluctant to call for increased support for research as a way of improving schools, because research procedure and outcome often are of more service to the researcher than to the schools, yet we find the potential of the effectiveness inquiry to be of sufficient merit to urge that significant resources be devoted to a wider and wider exploration and testing of the ingredients involved.
- A serious, local-level commitment to far-reaching discussions of an effective school (or schools) on

the part of educators, parents, and researchers leads inevitably to a review and restatement of what schools should be doing and the priority that parents and the community place on schools attaining certain learning goals with children.

It would be valuable for all motivated and sincere participants in discussions of effective public schools to realize and accept the fact that such a discussion is not entirely educational in character. It is discussion that unavoidably and realistically often involves political dimensions and the emotions of racial and ethnic allegiance. To attempt to prevent these elements from becoming a legitimate part of the consideration would cast doubt on the integrity of the discussion and the value of the outcome.

A Final Word

As we said in the beginning, the outcome of bringing together so diverse a group of participants was unpredictable. The paths of parents, school practitioners and educational researchers seldom cross, although they have a common concern: what happens to children in school.

We learned from living through the experience with them that participants shared <u>total</u> agreement on only one topic: "All children can learn" is a basic assumption from which any discussion of effective schools must spring. The importance of a parent's

role was another premise that no one denied, but there was much disagreement about the link between parents' involvement and effective schools, and specifically whether that link has been supported, negated, or dealt with inadequately by existing research.

Despite their differences, participants, in our view, accomplished much. For us the conference was a wonderful mix of energy and frustration. Everyone showed a high level of interest in the topic, and worked long hours to wrestle with issues, many of which turned out to be unsolvable. We are convinced that the energy invested in this conference will bring everyone involved one step closer to improving public schooling for children.

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